Some people discover their calling through trial and error, an accident, or revisiting something that had been previously overlooked. International and Intercultural Communication (IIC) graduate student Andrew Repp found his calling from a lifetime of globetrotting.

“I chose to study International and Intercultural Communication at DU after a three year tour with the U.S. Peace Corps in Azerbaijan,” said Repp. “My experiences there, especially with my amazing host family, solidified a lifelong curiosity in intercultural exchange that came from a childhood living around the world with my family.”

After packing up and moving from Chicago to St. Petersburg, Russia in 1999, Repp and his family lived there for four years while his father taught at a Lutheran seminary. His parents met in Moscow during an undergraduate study abroad program and speak near-fluent Russian which allowed for a more immersive experience for Repp and his family.

“We went to an international school and intercultural communication was a vital part of that school's social life,” he said. “I never remember any animosity between students, only respectful exchange of customs, culture and food while bonding over our common identity of expatriates.”

Repp has studied a variety of languages, stemming from his parents’ passion for languages, and he credits a former social studies teacher for igniting his interest in anthropology.

“So far, my grad school classes here at DU have connected some of my past academic interests with my international experience, and have opened my eyes to the spectrum of research and opportunities that is out there in the field of international relations, communication, media and journalism,” said Repp.

“I attribute this to the format of the international and intercultural communication program, which is flexible enough to allow you to really take classes related to your personal and professional interests. It's exactly what I was hoping to get out of grad school.”

One of Repp’s most rewarding experiences was a 2015 Appalachian Trail thru-hike. The trail is home to about 3 million annual visitors, where hikers take months to traverse hundreds—and in Repp’s case, thousands—of miles. The trail length changes every year, according to Repp, and was 2189 miles long when he hiked it.

As a reminder of how much Repp and his fellow hikers had accomplished, they used Repp’s “Miles to Go” tattoo on his leg as a mileage countdown to the end of the trail.

“The ‘Miles To Go’ tattoo is a fun little reminder to keep looking ahead to the next adventure. I got it with my younger brother in 2013, but it really gained new meaning during my
Appalachian Trail thru-hike,” Repp said. “On our hike, I would have fellow hikers write how many miles we had above the tattoo, changing into a sort of odometer for us. The smaller the number got, the more we had accomplished.”

As for deciding what is a more challenging feat, hiking a 2189 mile-long trail or attending graduate school, Repp believes that both have a unique set of challenges but are equally rewarding.

His next accomplishment is set for this summer, where he’ll be moving to Jordan for an internship in journalism—with hopes of adding Arabic to his languages skillset.

“If something tells me I won't get sick of life on the move,” said Repp. “Traveling the world has taught me to fear complacency. I really have no idea where I'll be in five years, and I like it that way.”